

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Twenty-Seven.]

Pilgrims to the Holy Land—Difficulties of Transportation—A Queer Beggar—Travelling by Guide Book—Camping Out—A Glorious Lay-Out for Pilgrims.

IN CAMP, Mountains of Lebanon, }
Syria, September 11th, 1867. }

The Pilgrims Preparing.

For the last two months we have been in a worry about one portion of this Holy Land pilgrimage. I refer to transportation service. We knew very well that Palestine was a country which did not do a large passenger business, and every man we came across who knew anything about it gave us to understand that not half of our party would be able to get dragomen and animals. As far as I was individually concerned, I did not bother much about the matter, but Brown, who had somehow imbibed a vague notion that a dragoman was some kind of a rare and mysterious beast like a rhinoceros or a mastodon, was greatly distressed. At Constantinople everybody fell to telegraphing the American Consuls at Alexandria and Beirout to give notice that we wanted dragomen and transportation. We were desperate—would take horses, jackasses, cameleopards, kangaroos—anything. At Smyrna, more telegraphing was done, to the same end. Also, fearing for the worst, we telegraphed for a large number of seats in the diligence for Damascus, and horses for the ruins of Baalbec.

As might have been expected, a notion got abroad in Syria and Egypt that the whole population of the Province of America (the Turks consider us a trifling little province in some unvisited corner of the world,) were coming to the Holy Land—and so, when we got to Beirout yesterday, we found the place full of dragomen and their outfits. We had all intended to go by diligence to Damascus, and switch off to Baalbec as we went along—because we expected to rejoin the ship at Mount Carmel, and take to the woods from there. However, when our own private party of eight found that we could just as well make the through trip from Beirout, we adopted that programme. We have never been much trouble to a Consul before, but we have been a fearful bother to our Consul at Beirout. I mention this because I cannot help admiring his patience, his industry, and his accommodating spirit. I mention it also, because I think some of our gang did not give him as full credit for his excellent services as he deserved.

Well, out of our eight, three were selected to attend to all business connected with the expedition. The rest of us had nothing to do but look at the beautiful city of Beirout, with its bright, newhouses nestled among a wilderness of green shrubbery spread abroad over an upland that sloped gently down to the sea; and also at the mountains of Lebanon that environ it; and likewise to bathe in the transparent blue water that rolled its billows about the ship (we did not know there were sharks there). We had also to range up and down through the town and look at the costumes; these are picturesque and fanciful, but not so varied as at Constantinople and Smyrna; the women here add an agony—in the two former cities the sex wear a thin veil which one can see through and often expose their ankles; but at Beirout they cover their entire faces with dark-colored or black veils, so that they look like mummies, and then expose their breasts to the public. A young gentleman (I believe he was a Greek,) volunteered to show us around the city, and said it would afford him great pleasure, because he was studying English and wanted practice in that language. When we had finished the rounds, however, he called for remuneration—said he hoped the gentlemen would give him a trifle in the way of a few piastres (equivalent to a few five cent pieces). We did so. The Consul was surprised when he heard it, and said he knew the young fellow's family very well, and that they were an old and highly respectable family and worth a hundred and fifty thousand dollars! Some people, so situated, would have been ashamed of the berth he had with us and his manner of sneaking into it.

At the appointed time our business committee reported, and said all things were in readiness—that we were to start to-day, with horses, pack animals and tents, and go to Baalbec, Damascus, the Sea of Tiberias, thence southward by the way of the scene of Jacob's Dream and other notable Bible localities to Jerusalem—from thence probably to the Dead Sea, but possibly not—and then strike for the ocean and rejoin the ship three or four weeks hence at Joppa; terms, five dollars a day a piece, in gold, and everything to be furnished by the dragoman. They said we would live as well as at a hotel. I had read something like that before, and didn't shame my judgment by believing a word of it. I said nothing, however, but just packed up a blanket and a shawl to sleep in, pipes and tobacco, two or three woollen shirts, a portfolio, a guide-book (the same being a Bible), a deck of cards and a tooth-brush. I also took along a towel and a cake of soap, to inspire respect in the Arabs, who would take me for a king in disguise.

We were to select our horses at 3 p. m. At that hour Abraham, the dragoman, marshalled them before us. With all solemnity I set it down here, that those horses were the hardest lot I ever did come across, and their accoutrements were in exquisite keeping with their style. One brute had an eye out; another had his tail sawed off close, like a jackass rabbit, and was proud of it; another had a bony ridge running from his neck to his tail, like one of those ruined aqueducts one sees about Rome, and then had a neck on him like a bowsprit; they all limped, and had sore backs, and likewise raw places and old scales scattered about their persons like brass nails in an old hair trunk; their gaits were marvellous to contemplate, and replete with variety—under way the procession looked like a fleet in a storm. It was fearful. Brown shook his head and said:

"That dragon's going to get himself into trouble fetching these old crates out of the hospital the way they are, unless he's got a permit."

I said nothing. The display was exactly according to the guide-book, and were we not travelling by the guide-book? I selected a certain horse because I thought I saw him shy, and I thought that a horse that had spirit enough to shy was not to be despised. However, and I have found out since, that it must have been a mistake. He never shied—he only staggered.

Pilgrim Style.

At 6 o'clock p. m. we came to a halt here on the breezy summit of a beautiful mountain overlooking the sea and the beautiful valley where dwelt some of those enterprising Phenicians of ancient times we read so much about; all around us are what were once the dominions of Hiram, King of Tyre, who furnished timber from the cedars of these Lebanon hills to build portions of King Solomon's Temple with.

Shortly after six, our pack train arrived. I had not seen it before, and a good right I had to be astonished. We had nineteen serving men and twenty-six pack mules! It was a perfect caravan. It looked like one, too, as it wound among the rocks. I wondered what in the very mischief we wanted with such a vast turnout as that, for eight men. I wondered awhile, but soon I began to hanker for a tin plate, and some bacon and beans. You know, I had camped out many and many a time before, and knew just what was coming. I went off, without waiting for serving men, and unsaddled my horse, and washed such portions of his ribs and his spine as projected through his hide, and when I came back, behold five stately circus tents were up—tents that were brilliantly circled with blue, and gold, and crimson, and all manner of splendid adornment! I was speechless. Then they brought eight little iron bedsteads, and set them up in the tents; they put a soft mattress and pillows and good blankets and two snow-white sheets on each bed. Next, they rigged a pewter citchers, basins, soap and the whitest of towels—one set for each man; they pointed to pockets in the tent, and said we could put our small traps in them for convenience, and if we needed pins or such things, they were sticking everywhere. Then came the finishing touch—they spread nice carpets on the floor! I simply said, "If you call this camping out, all right—but it isn't the style I am used to; my little baggage that I brought along is at a discount."

It grew dark, and they put candles on the tables—candles set in bright, new, brazen candlesticks. And soon the bell—a genuine, simon-pure bell-rung, and we were invited to "the saloon." I had thought before that we had a tent or so too many, and now here was one, at least, provided for; it was to be used for nothing but an eating-saloon. Like the others, it was high enough for a family of giffaffes to live in, and was very handsome and clean and bright-colored within. It was a gem of a place. A table for eight, and eight canvas chairs; a tablecloth and napkins whose whiteness and whose fineness laughed to scorn the things we were used to in the great excursion steamer; soup-plates, dinner-plates—everything, you understand, in the handsomest kind of style. It was wonderful! And they call *this* camping out! Those stately fellows brought in a dinner which consisted of roast mutton, roast chicken, roast goose, potatoes, bread, tea, pudding, apples and delicious grapes; the viands were better cooked than any we had eaten for weeks and the table made a finer appearance, with its large silver candlesticks and other finery, than any table we had sat down to for a good while, and yet that eternally polite dragoman, Abraham, came bowing in and apologizing for the whole affair, on account of the unavoidable confusion of getting under way for a very long trip, and promising to do a great deal better in future! We took up a club and drove him out.

It is midnight, now, and we break camp at six in the morning. Of course I must turn in at once.

They call this camping out. At this rate it is a glorious privilege to be a pilgrim to the Holy Land.

MARK TWAIN.